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ABSTRACT

This study focused on the thoughts, related schema, and decision-making of student teaching supervisors as they go about their work of supervision. Twelve practicing supervisors were asked to write their thoughts on a three-stage data gathering, circle instrument. These concepts were weighted to reflect the significance each concept had in the supervisor's judgment at that particular point in the student teaching experience. Concepts a supervisor considered crucial for the student teacher to move forward through the student teaching experience were identified. Attributes or characteristics of the concepts were also determined. Two additional research techniques, think-talk (supervisors reviewing a vidiotape of their supervising student teachers) and case studies, were applied to a limited number of supervisors. Comparisons among these three categories of data (supervisor's transcripts, circle instrument data, and researcher's notes) were made to explore how well the circle instrument data compared with reports of thought-in-action while supervising particular student teachers. The circle format for journal-keeping appeared to capture the thoughts of supervisors, since relationships and movement from one time frame to another could be graphically illustrated. (Author/JD)

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DISCOVERING SUPERVISORS' THOUGHT PATTERNS THROUGH JOURNALS

by

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Abstract
Discovering Supervisors' Thought
Patterns Through Journals

Increased dialogue is evolving about the important facet of teacher education called supervision. This study focused on the thoughts, related schema and decision making of student teaching supervisors as they go about their work of supervision.

Supervisors were asked to journal, write their thoughts, on a three stage data gathering, circle instrument. These concepts were weighted reflecting the significance each concept had in the supervisor's judgement at that particular point in the student teaching experience. Concepts a supervisor considered crucial for the student teacher to move forward through the student teaching experience were identified. Attributes or characteristics of the concepts were also determined.

Two additional research techniques; think-talk (supervisors reviewing a videotape of their supervising student teachers) and case studies were applied to a limited number of supervisors. Comparisions among these three categories of data (supervisor's transcripts, circle instrument data and researcher's notes) were made to explore how well the circle instrument data compared with reports of thought-in-action while supervising particular student teachers.

It seems safe to say that the circle format for journaling does capture the thoughts of supervisors. Relationships (schema) and movement from one time frame to another can be graphically illustrated.

Discovering Supervisors' Thought Patterns Through Journals

Introduction

Increased dialogue is evolving about the important aspect of teacher education called supervision. This study, part of a larger research project is focused on the thoughts and decision making of supervisors as they go about their work of supervision. Journaling was used to capture supervisor thought patterns and language at three stages in the student teaching experience. Student teaching, one of several supervised experiences in a teacher education program was selected because of the unique nature of the supervisor's role. Both Rust (1986) and Lortie (1975) report preservice supervisors operate in an atmosphere of "privatism" in which "they act alone without peer review." Further, Rust's (1986) research indicated the existing "teacher education programs had little impact on the supervision provided to the student teachers enrolled in them"(p.16). These findings suggests that the supervision facet of student teaching would be appropriate to study because of this identified lack of intervening outside forces and because student teaching is widely believed to serve crucial educative and gatekeeping functions in teacher education.

As greater insights and understandings of teachers' thinking and decision making emerge from the writings of Clark and Peterson (1986), Shalvelson and Stern (1981), Munby (1982), Elbaz (1983) and Clark and Lampert (1986) impetus for parallel study of supervisor

judgements develops. The urgency of learning more about supervisory thinking exists because a comprehensive concept of what constitutes "good" teaching is an intricate component of supervisor's thinking and knowing what supervisors consider important will help teacher educators to understand and improve the practice of supervision.

Rationale for Journaling

The premise of this exploratory study is that by identifying the thoughts and schema supervisors held while supervising student teachers insights might be gained into the "reflection in action" of supervisors. Schon (1984) defined reflection in action as "on-the-spot surfacing, criticizing, restructuring and testing of intuitive understanding of experience phenomena"(p. 42). He further emphasized the importance of this thinking with the process of praxis--the intersection of practice and theory.

Garman (1987) provides assistance in the study of reflection-in-action by making a distinction in data sources for reflection. Reflection on action may be drawn from stable data i.e., video and audio tapes and variations of a recording of the phenomena of interest. Reflection through recollection emerges from "unstable data" such as recall of the incident. This study attempts to collect and use both stable and unstable data to gain insights about supervisors' reflection-in-action process.

For gathering unstable data we chose journaling. Rust (1986) through written journals and Niemeyer and Moon (1986) using a circle format data gathering instrument were able to describe supervisors' concepts and determine thought patterns of relationship among schema.

Bougon's (1983) circular cognitive and cause maps develop the relationship between thinking, concepts and schema. The study provided impetus for the circle format data gathering journal used by Niemeyer and Moon (1986) in studying supervisors' judgements. In the findings of the latter study it was determined that data listed by subjects on circle instruments compared favorably with concepts gleaned from traditional written field supervisor journals. Some supervisors participating in the study also responded that working with the circle instrument proved freeing and reduced anxiety about making lists of concepts.

Selected Comments from the Literature

The possibility of identifying the thought patterns of supervisors and how these patterns are used during supervision has been discussed by a number of writers (Garman, 1987) (Rust, 1986) (Sergiovanni, 1984, 1986) (Smyth, 1986) (Zeichner, 1982). There seems to be agreement that supervision is not a linear activity but involves reflection, introspection, intuition and an understanding of the dialectical nature of the role. Zeichner and Tabachnick's (1982) study suggest that supervisors do in fact carry a bias or prejudice (focusing orientation) into the supervisory visit. Bray (1986) in her study of instructors' thinking provides further support for a reflective look at supervision as well as at instruction.

Sergiovanni (1986) provides insights about the process of moving from raw descriptive data to clinical interpretation of those data

that have been helpful in looking at the supervision process and supervisory judgments:

> The more cultural or mind dependent the science the greater is the disparity in meaning between the external configuration of events (brute) and internal meanings (sense). The meaning of brute data is fixed free from mind and context conditions. As brute is interpreted into sense-data meaning typically changes. Different mind sets and contexts, for example, make different sense of the same brute data. It follows that sensible judgments about the adequacy of teaching cannot be made by merely collecting and analyzing brute data. Instead, worth is determined by examining such data in light of the context from which it emerges.(p.6)

Block (1986) in a study of the comprehension strategies of second language readers used a think-aloud process similar to the process used in this study. In the beginning of her report on this study she states the following.

> The thoughts that wander or rush through the minds of readers, the searches and struggles for meaning, the reflections and associations, are hidden from the outside observer. Yet this struggle and search for control are the core of reading comprehension.(p. 463).

It seems that one could substitute the words "understanding supervision" for "reading comprehension" and be quite accurate.

Another perspective on the importance of seeing patterns of thought and the intersections of empirical research and practice is explained by Shuell (1982). Shuell explains the traditional or conventional manner of improving instruction as merely "adapting results of empirical research designed to answer other types of questions." However, this is only a beginning step and sometimes not really helpful. What is crucial is the way the problem is represented. This determines how successful a solution will be. For instructional purposes we need to know how to represent the problem

in a given situation. When situation specific linkage between empirical research and practice is missing, judgments regarding the use of knowledge may be incorrect. Identifying cognitive patterns may help make the appropriate connections. This places increasing importance on recognizing the relationship of thought patterns and reflection to decision making in instruction and supervision.

Research Design

Twelve practicing supervisors of student teachers convened for a session of data gathering about their individual thoughts about student teaching supervision in December, 1986. Three teacher training programs of institutions in Michigan were represented. The student teaching facet of these programs represented both quarter-long and semester-long in school experiences. Years of experience supervising student teachers ranged from neophyte (first year) to seasoned (over twenty years) with a majority having supervised more than ten years.

After a welcome and a brief history of the Supervisory Judgments Project, written directions for data gathering were distributed and orally reviewed (see Appendix A). Each subject was given a large work sheet with three widely spaced concentric circles to allow data to be entered within each circle. An additional supply of papers with a single circle with a short line in the center where a concept could later be written were also distributed.

Circle Format Journaling

Directions given to the supervisors indicated that three circles represented three different points in time during the student teaching experience. The largest circle represented a point early in the semester or term, the second circle a place on or near the mid-term, and the small innermost circle a point near the close of the student teaching experience. The supervisors were also told they had one hour to complete the data gathering tasks. This was an attempt to gather unstable data from reflection through recollection at about three points in the student teaching experience.

The supervisors were asked what thoughts or concepts related to student teaching supervision came to their minds when they made their first visit to a student teaching site. They were further directed to list these thoughts or concepts in the outer circle on the large work sheet. Subjects were encouraged to use one or two words, not long phrases. Directions also emphasized listing first impressions, not an exhaustive listing.

Supervisors' were directed to move on to the remaining two circles representing the mid point of student teaching and their final site visit, and to repeat the concept listing procedure.

Upon completing the concept writing task supervisors were asked to place a weighting reflecting the significance each concept has in their individual judgment at a particular point in the student teaching experience. Weightings could range from 1 to 5, with 5 as high or very significant in making a decision about the progress of a student teacher. If a concept appeared more than once across the circles it should be weighted independently each time it appeared.

Supervisors were further directed to underline any concepts which they considered to be crucial for a student teacher to master in order to move forward to the next phase of student teaching. Additionally they were directed to place a second line under any concept they judged so important it alone if not acceptably mastered would cause the supervisor to pull a student teacher from their program. All underlined items were to be circled for review purposes and emphasis.

Supervisors were then asked to list each of their circled, underlined concepts on the line in the single circles of the separate sheets of paper provided. As supervisors attended to each of these crucial concepts, they were requested to list the attributes or descriptors that were in their thoughts about each concept.

After having outlined and demonstrated these tasks the researchers asked if there were any questions. One clarification was given. The researchers asked the subjects to begin.

The supervisors busily set about writing concepts in a serious, quiet manner with the exception of two individuals. These subjects did no writing for some time. Their thoughtful appearance lead the researchers to believe they may be reflecting on the student teaching cycle and their related supervisory decisions. (After the data gathering session their comments confirmed our assumption). They did eventually move along with the tasks.

Time was called by the researchers at the end of one hour in keeping with the earlier directions. A majority of the subjects had already completed the data gathering tasks; the remainder were well into listing concepts and related attributes they considered significant in making decisions in the supervision of student teachers.

While the data gathering instruments were being collected it was interesting to the researchers to have subjects verbalize that they had found the data gathering experience stimulating and a rare opportunity to look at the total student teaching experience.

Attempts to further explore this research technique were made. These validation attempts consisted of "think talk" procedures by participating supervisors and case studies done by the researchers of supervisors in the act of supervising. Both are described in the following sections of this paper.

Think-Talk

Supervisors were videotaped as they were actively supervising individual student teachers in field settings. Each supervisor reviewed their own video tape. Using a list of questions to direct their thinking, the supervisor reported what thoughts they were thinking as they moved through the supervisory session. These statements were audio taped and transcribed. A content analysis of the transcripts for concepts related to supervisory decisions was conducted. This was an attempt to gather stable data from reflection on action. Concepts garnered were contrasted against those concepts individual subjects listed on their circle instruments to determine consistency.

Case Studies

Different supervisors were observed at three different points in time by the researcher as they were actively supervising student

teachers in field settings. After each observation of the student teacher the supervisor audio taped or wrote their thoughts as they supervised the student teachers. These reports were transcribed. An analysis of these transcripts for concepts related to supervisory decisions was conducted. This was gathering unstable data from reflection through recollection. These data were also contrasted against the concept listings the supervisors made during their participation in the circle instrument data gathering.

The researchers recorded impressions and observed behaviors of each supervisor during the observation. These data were generated to substantiate and elaborate elements of the supervisor's transcript.

Comparisons among these three categories of data (supervisor's transcript, circle instrument data and researcher's notes) were made to explore how well the circle instrument data compared with reports of thought-in-action while supervising particular student teachers.

Analysis of Data

A Circle Format for Journaling

Ten assumptions guided the data gathering and analysis through use of circle format journaling. For the purpose of discussion we have grouped the statements into four broad categories. They are

The Ability to Identify Thoughts:

a. Supervisors are able to identify the concepts they use during the supervision of student teachers
b. Supervisors are able to identify the attributes they use to provide meaning for each concept.

To Discriminate Among the Thoughts and/or Concepts:

a. Supervisors can discriminate among concepts those critical to the continued professional development of the student teacher during the term of student teaching.

The Evolution of Patterns or Repetition of Ideas and Concepts:

a. There will be considerable repetition of concepts identified by the supervisors
b. There will be repetition of attributes (descriptors) identified for concepts
c. The number of concepts identified as critical by the supervisor will be greater than the number considered as not critical
d. Supervisors use an integrated cognitive structure or web in approaching and carrying out a supervisory observation of a student teacher
e. Supervisor's beliefs and prejudices are evident in the concepts identified and the attributes listed.

The Concepts Identified are Related to Specific Content, Context, and Time Frame:

a. Supervisors are able to project their changing cognitive structure across an entire term of student teaching
b. Concepts identified by the supervisors are related to the content, discipline, the context and the time frame.

Supervisors' Ability to Identify Thoughts

The supervisors participating in this study varied in experience from one year to more than twenty. Colleagues and their unit administrators judge them as successful professionals. Their formal training in supervision varies widely. However, in this study there was general consistency in their ability to identify their thoughts or concepts used in supervision. This was also true when they listed attributes for the concepts listed as crucial. Initial hesitation in beginning the task of writing their thoughts on the circles quickly changed to total involvement and a reasonably constant flow of writing.

The writing task ask them to project over the entire term, listing thoughts for three specific time segments. They were able to

do this and in some cases even included thoughts relating to pre-student teaching experiences. The writing patterns for this activity differed. Some participants attended to only one time frame (circle) then moved to a second. Others moved back and forth across the time frames (circles). They seemed to be focusing on a particular thought or concept and its importance over the term.

Discriminate Among the Thoughts and/or Concepts

It was apparent from the weightings that once the commitment had been made to list a concept or idea the tendency was to consider it as very important. Few weightings of 1 or 2 were given. The participants were able to discriminate further. When asked to underline once any concept considered crucial to the success of the student teaching experience and underline twice concepts so critical the student teacher might be "pulled" if an appropriate level of proficiency was not achieved, they were able to do so. Nearly 50 percent of the thoughts or concepts listed were identified as crucial while 17 percent were marked as so crucial the student would be pulled at that point if an appropriate level of proficiency was not achieved.

Evolution of Patterns or Repetition of Ideas and Concepts

Patterns of thought begin to emerge as some thoughts and concepts were repeated in different time frames as well as listed as attributes or descriptors for the crucial concepts in the separate

smaller circles. Usually the same language pattern was used but occasionally there was a slight change in word order or new ones added.

The patterns were also apparent from the shifts in words and priorities from the first part of the period of student teaching to the mid-point and then to the final report. In other words, patterns emerged from repetition over the time sequence and from the changes. The tightening or drawing down of the number of variables by the end of the period of teaching was apparent.

Certain anomalies might be explained as supervisor bias or prejudice appearing. Strong feelings against a particular curriculum of a school was expressed by one supervisor. One participant listed "health and safety needs" as absolutely crucial for all three time segments. Other similar anomalies appeared. Does this indicate supervisor bias or is their another explanation?

One of the most interesting anomalies was the use of negative terms to describe a concept. The attributes listed provided a deficit pattern. The participant seemed to be looking for what was wrong. Does this mean they go into the classroom with a negative thought pattern?

Concepts Identified Are Related to Specific Content, Context, and Time Frame.

Concepts and thoughts written did not seem to be attached to specific content discipline areas. Content was usually listed as a separate generic term. Its importance as a concept shifted from time

frame to time frame. There seems to be an assumption that content knowledge is present for most student teachers and once monitored and competency ascertained it became less a concern of the college supervisor. The other asumption may be that the cooperating teacher is the one most capable of judging this variable.

Case Studies and Think Aloud Protocols

The case studies and the think aloud procedure were attempts to not only identify the thoughts of supervisors but to also look at their behaviors. The hope was this would give us more confidence that what was being said was in fact evident in the observed behaviors of supervisors. This process would also provide more detail regarding those thoughts or concepts identified. Each concept would be embedded in the oral discussion and/or writing. Concerns such as context, time frame, flow of the term and variables related to affect would be more apparent.

Three guidelines were used for analysis of data from the case studies and think aloud protocol. They were: (a) words and/or concepts reappearing consistently, (b) parallels between think-talk and case studies as well as between supervisor and research observer in the case study reports, and (c) comparison with existing theory and literature review. Finally these data were compared to data from the circle format journals.

Using this process eleven major categories were identified. They are context, affect, administration & organization, instructional skills, management, personal & professional skills, beliefs, supervising teacher, college supervisor, conferences, learning by pupils.

Some of the categories are in fact concepts while others include many concepts. It was further inferred that the number of times a concept was listed, the amount of time devoted to a concept during the observation period and the amount of oral or written discussion given to a concept would indicate a priority for the concepts and/or categories.

Using this process of inference the first priority was given to context. This concept with descriptors was listed more often, more time devoted to it and discussed in more detail that any other. It seemed to be in the supervisor's mind especially at the beginning of the observation visit but it was always an overlay for everything else observed. Comments regarding context were made throughout the observation visit. There was less attention given to context in the circle format journals than in the case studies and think-aloud process. It might be that contextual data is more apparent in the case studies and think-aloud process because they both capture more detail and richness. While context was always important it did not carry the same level of concern later in the student teaching experience.

Contextual thoughts identified which are not usually considered include greeting colleagues and pupils in the hallway and awareness of handicappers in the school and classroom. Room location in the building was also identified as important contextual datum.

Judgement regarding context variables seems to trigger or at least affect all the other judgements.

The second major concept was affect. The primary concern in this category seemed to be linkage, bridging or scaffolding. One participant stated this is "the antecedant to success." Other

attributes listed were humor, support, accepting and secure. Unique phrases which seemed to capture unique mental images included "honoring children," "a family kind of feeling" and "reaching out." It was also apparent a great amount of time is devoted to this concept throughtout the observation visit and the total field experience. Perhaps it receives a little more attention in the beginning than toward the end.

Program administration and organization often became crucial factors regarding perceptions of success or failure. Supervisors spent considerable time informing, negotiating and taking care of public relations. The medium truly is an important part of the message in supervision. Form and presence seem to be crucial!

Closely related was the concept of classroom management. Because of the priority given to management it was considered separate from the category of instructional skills. Management was much like context in that it appeared repeatedly in the supervisors' thoughts throughout the observation visit and the term. While it may be more crucial during the first half of the term it is still considered at the end. The inference from the data was that supervisors identified management as "the structure that makes everything else work."

Four attributes for the concept of management appeared often. They were (a) a clear system, (b) consistent consequences, (c) sensitivity and (d) student involvement. Unique phrases which painted a more complete picture were "no 'scapegoat' students," "does not bully students" and "makes minute-by-minute assessment and changes."

The remaining concepts and/or categories were the personal beliefs of the supervisor, instructional skills, conferences,

learning by pupils in the classroom, personal and professional skills, the college supervisor and the cooperating teacher.

While personal and professional skills/belief did not occupy as much time as some other categories it seems to be a particularly explosive area. Concepts and attributes listed for this area included "sexual ethics," "appearance," "honesty" and "willing to take a risk to grow." Many of these seemed to have such power that they can cancel out all other concepts.

Interesting and surprising thought patterns surround two of the remaining categories. They are the college supervisor and conferences.

Conferences received little attention. It cannot be inferred that conferences are not important but it does seem safe to infer that what happens <u>on the way</u> to the conference is more important than the formal conference itself. Feedback through nonverbal signals or facial expression during the teaching activity seems to be crucial. In the case studies and think aloud process supervisors did a great amount of informal conferencing. The formal conference a means of bringing closure seemed almost obligatory.

Is it possible we have over emphasized the formal conference? Do we provide feedback appropriate in kind and level for the developmental level of the student teacher? This area needs more careful study.

Finally, interesting insight into the role of the college supervisor was obtained. The loneliness of the role was apparent. Comments such as "no office," "not my turf," "sat down wherever we could," and "square my shoulders to appear in control" all indicate the isolation of the role.

The high level of energy required for supervision was obvious. The case studies and think-aloud process showed supervisors teaching and giving feedback to the student teacher and cooperating teacher simultaneously, one explicitly and one implicitly. Supervisors were constantly scanning, reading, reacting and making judgements within a very personalistic framework. They also seem to realize their position is much weaker than the cooperating teacher's. One supervisor said, "The field instructor's bearing on the student teacher is remote compared with the relationship and influence of the supervising teacher. It looks like he's her mentor."

Conclusions:

The parallels between the written comments of the college supervisor and the behaviors observed by the researcher were very close. Concepts identified in these case studies also paralleled the concepts identified in the think-aloud protocol. These two procedures provided a rich and vivid picture of supervisors' thoughts not obtained by using the circle format journals.

However, what was apparent was the parallel between concepts identified through these two procedures and those listed on the circles. While the wording was more detailed in the case studies and think-aloud there was considerable similarity with the thoughts/concepts on the circles.

The concepts underlined twice on the circles to designate their cruciality all fit into one of the eleven priority categories from the case studies and think-aloud process.

It seems safe to say that the circle format for journaling does capture the thoughts of supervisors. It does not provide the same detail as either case studies or think-aloud. However, relationships and movement from one time frame to another can be graphically illustrated. The completeness of the picture is surprising.

Supervisors do have evaluative expectations or organizing schema as they enter a school to observe a student teacher. The specific pattern they use and how it may be modified seems to depend on their initial reading of the context. While they do possess knowledge of competencies or concepts judged crucial for success they seemed to be applied in a context-sensitive manner.

Supervisors' patterns of thought seemed to have different points of reference or foundations. Some appeared to be built on a personalistic base, some on a competency base, a few used content, one or two seemed to have a child or pupil advocate base and a few had a systems view of the school.

This seems consistent with Rust's (1986) finding that supervisors have a variety of images of the teacher. Other findings similar to Rust (1986) include: (a) importance of initial building of trust, (b) management as a pre-eminent concern, and (c) supervisory concerns became focal points for decisive action. This is again consistent with our findings in an earlier study (Niemeyer & Moon 1986).

Our data revealed only occasional mention of the specifics of a teacher education program. We have no explanation for this. Perhaps the nature of our methodology did not capture this information, or perhaps the coupling between college classroom and public school classroom is quite loose.

Finally, as Rust (1986) suggests, there seem to be some "regularities" in the patterns and complexities of supervision. To identify more of them and how they interface (contextually) in practice with theory and subject matter is our challenge. Our original objective when we began this series of research studies was to determine how we judge the success or failure of a student teacher. Perhaps through the methodology used in this study we can begin to identify the thinking, related schema, the behavior and the unfolding process which informs supervisor decision making. We can then begin to see the antecedents to making professional judgments during student teaching. We believe the first steps have been taken and a potentially useful picture is beginning to emerge.

Remaining Questions

The college supervisor seems to be monitoring for both points of intersection and disjuncture. Is this a realistic expectation? Are there other contradictions within this role? Is it reasonable to expect a college supervisor to provide simultaneously significant feedback, psychological support, evaluation and guidance toward professional identity for a student teacher? Is this feasible considering the lack of any power base? Maybe supervision needs to be reconceptualized or perhaps this will occur as teacher education programs change. Is there congruence between the importance of the role and academic respect and encouragement given by college administrators? Should minimally trained graduate assistants be expected to carry out these functions considering the complexity and demands of the role? Should we consider new constructs for supervision?

APPENDIX A

Please turn to the large worksheet that has three circles. These circles represent three different points in time during the student teaching experience. The largest circle is early in the semester or term, the second circle represents a place on or near the mid-term, and the small inner circle a point near the close of the student teaching experience.

Step I. What are the thoughts or concepts related to Student Teacher supervision that come to your mind when you make your first visit to a student teaching site? Please list these on the outer circle on the worksheet. Strive to use one or two words--not long phrases. We seek your first impressions and not an exhaustive listing.

Step II. Move to the remaining two circles representing the mid Student Teacher point and your final site visit. Repeat the concept writing procedure.

Step III. Now, place a weighting reflecting the significance each concept has in your judgement at that particular point in the student teaching experience. The weightings may range from 5 to 1 with 5 as high or very significant. If a concept appears more than once give it a weighting each time it appears.

Step IV. Underline any concepts (if they exist) which you consider crucial for the student teacher to move forward to the next circle. Place a second line under any concept so significant it alone would cause you to pull a student teacher. With your green marker please circle any underline concepts.

Step V. Now write each of your circled concepts in the circle on one of the separate sheets of paper. As you attend to this concept write the indicators or characteristics that are included in your cluster of thoughts.

Any questions about these directions? Please start.

Your cooperation in this study is greatly appreciated.

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